PRISM
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Peace College
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Peace College Literary Magazine
Spring 1999

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Teaching Who Will Listen

They look to me for reasons
how to be.

Young bodies bending,
stretching over trophies, minds
flitting over fields
with cawings and the black
wings of wanting and not finding.

What would I know?
I've only ridden the bus once,
I wasn't driving, the scenery outside
went by so fast the window
was swinging between
headaches and astonished oohs.

Green patches and farmers
plowing what we eat, trees waving
at our windy gazing eyes.

What have I to say
beyond astonishment?

Sometimes you arrive: led down
the ramp of completion.

The lust of mind
collects its twigs, collects,
makes nests, climbs up the empty
tree, sings into the vacant air.

No wonder you dress alike:
There's comfort in the sameness,
like blood that spills downhill
for everyone. Red preening of needs.

Other lives are stranger
than our own: caverns deeper,
with no bats to tell.

Yet somehow maybe
the mole that burrows knows
the garden better than anyone. Blind
but begging and beginning,
this time for real.

They look for me to reason,
I say, go touch and bloom, hear
storms coming, watch
as they clear out your life,

the house left standing
is yourself, insured, with nothing

that does not matter still
belonging and a face that stares up
grateful in the glaring sun.

David Radavich

This piece was written by the nationally-renowned poet David Radavich on the occasion of his visit to Peace.

Thank Yous

A Thousand 'thank-yous' upon the heavens
that I am to be successful.

Not at being anything particular,
But just at being me.

Shana Wheeling

Dilsey's Talk with God

(based on William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury)

Well Lord, I did the best I could. I done been with that family most of my life and you know I did all I knew how to do. My mama used to tell me I did too much for those people, but I couldn't just walk away from those kids. Lord knows they was going to have a hard enough time anyway, what with their daddy drinking like he did and Miss Caroline not caring about her children the way a mama should. I let my own kids suffer so I could take care of them white children.

I did my best Lord. When that poor Benny was born, not knowing nothing, couldn't even call for his mama, I thought Miss Caroline going to lose her mind. I guess she did in a way, didn't she Lord? She give him the name Maury after her own brother, and then Miss Caroline gone and changed it to Benny when she found out he won't right in the head. Now I ask you Lord, what kind of nonsense that be?

Even knowing he couldn't understand nothing I said to him, I still loved that baby. I made sure he stayed clean, fed and warm. And you know that's more than his own mama ever did for him. Sometimes I wonder if he would have been better off just passing on after he come into this world. But Lord, I know you had a reason for sending him to us, and if you sent him here to teach the family something about caring for all God's children, I don't think your lesson was learned. This whole family, even Miss Candace, though she loved him, was too wrapped up in their own selves to put up with the likes of a retarded boy. But I cared for him and did what I could.

I done put up with a lot from that Miss Caroline too. I can't say Miss Caroline is a bad person. She just don't know no better. Always worrying about what other folks going to think of the family. Always wanting people to think she more than she was, and worrying she won't good enough for that drunk husband of hers, just cause he had a grandfather was a Governor or something. What she gonna do if she get to paradise Lord? She be up there trying to convince the angels she better than them. Heh! Heh! I kinda be looking forward to that Lord. If she had just put some of that worrying into her kids, maybe they'd have turned out different. When you think about it, can't hardly blame Mr. Compson for all that drinking. That man done had to put up with a lot from Miss Caroline.

It won't easy always being at her beck and call. Sometimes she would be up there in that room hollering for me to come do something for her, and my own feet and hands be hurting so bad from the cold, it was all I could do to make it up them stairs. And didn't I have enough to do looking after her children? I'm not complaining Lord, but it sure would have been nice to have something done for me once in awhile.

I done the best I could with Miss Caddy too. She probably the best one of the bunch, but she made a mistake. I remember when my Caddy was

young, she would come running to me, throw her arms around me, and tell me how much she love me. She was the only one of those children ever did that. I sure do miss her. If it hadn't been for that Jason, Miss Caddy would still be here, looking after her own chile. I done my best for Quentin, but she needed her own mama. Sometimes I wonder what Miss Caddy is doing now. I know she done been with too many men Lord, but she just looking for the love she couldn't get at home. Last I heard, she with a man she met in New Orleans. I hope he a good man and she having a better life than she ever had here.

And that Jason. I know I'll be needing to ask your forgiveness for saying this, but I'll be glad not to ever have to lay eyes on that sorry soul again. That chile was hard to love from the very beginning. Always wanting things to be his way. Always tattling on the other children and sassing the grownups. I don't believe I ever heard a kind word come out of that boy's mouth. I did my best Lord, but there just won't nothing could be done for that boy. Now he's gone and put poor Benny in a home and won't allow nobody to go see the child. I shouldn't say this either, but I wanted to whoop and holler when Quentin done run off with all that money Miss Candace done sent her. Jason stole every cent of that money; hoarding it like a rat with too much cheese. He treated young Miss Quentin like she nothing but poor white trash, and he done got what he deserved. He a mean, bitter man with nothing to live for but getting more money.

Now Lord, don't go scolding me for saying what's the truth. I know I ought not talk that way bout folks, but that Jason done made it hard for me to have any good feelings for him. I hope he finds his way to you Lord, cause he surely going to need all your forgiveness.

I sure hope Mr. Quentin is sitting up there in the Kingdom with you Lord. Now, I don't hold with people killing themselves off, but I know he was not for this world. He was a good boy, but always too quiet and sad. Then the family went and sold off that pasture land that belong to Benny so Quentin could go to that fancy northern school. I always believe he felt guilty bout that. Felt like he had took something from Benny.

Quentin and Miss Candace always seemed so close, and I think it just about killed that boy when she got married. I tried my best with him, but I just never seemed to get through to Quentin. Now if his mama had just paid him some mind, and not always gone on about how Jason be the best one of the family, maybe Quentin could have gotten out of that school and gone on and done something with himself. I remember at the funeral, how all Miss Caroline and Jason could talk about was how Quentin had disgraced the family. What kind of mama don't cry at her own chile's funeral? I hope Quentin didn't suffer too much. You tell him Lord that I still think about him and I'll be seeing him again one day.

What can I say about Luster, Lord? I can only trust you to look after my boy. Maybe if I could've spent more time with him, he would've turned out different, but I did what I could. I remember that time he done spent the whole day looking for a quarter so he could go to the show. Then that Jason walk in with two passes for that show. Lord,

you could see the longing in my Luster's eyes. He wanted them tickets so bad. And Mr. Jason just burn them in the stove. Just outta pure meanness. I don't think Luster ever forgot that. My heart just breaks when I think about him being in the chain gang. He won't a bad person, and you know he could look after that Benny better than anybody. But Luster was headstrong and stubborn, just like his daddy. I warned him about them no account Negro boys, but Luster just wouldn't listen. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Now he paying the price.

My daughter, Frony, is the best of the bunch of them children. She married a nice man, has a nice home, and has given me four grandchildren. Now she taking care of her old mama. I didn't want her moving all the way back down here to look after me. Told that girl I could look after my own self. But she stubborn like her daddy too. So Frony and her husband done moved back down and given me a place to stay in their house. I did my best with her, and looks like it took. She a good, God-fearing woman. I got no worried about her.

I walked down to the church the other day and had me a good long talk with that new preacher. He's a young one and ain't learned how to put the fear of God into folks yet. I remember that preacher we had that one time years ago. That man sure knew how to stir up the spirit. Ain't seen one like that in many a Sunday. If you just give this young one a little help Lord, I think he'll do alright.

Well Lord, it's been a long, hard life. I've had some laughter and some tears, but I did what you asked me to. It won't be long now and I'll be coming home to glory. Frony says I'm a stubborn old woman and won't be going nowhere anytime soon, but as soon as you want to take me Lord, I'll be ready.

I done the best I knew how.

Sandra Burns

PRISM PRISM

Sleep

Dry kisses
in the night
between
my dreams
of you
Roll Over
to block the light
from my morning
view
Slap
the alarm clock,
my slumber
comes
to an end
Crawl out
of bed
to face the day,
I've got to do it again.

Stephanie Carden

Trimming the Tree

A timid, fragile face peers around a bleached corner, afraid to enter the room.
Courage of a young heart forces steady movement as four generations unite.
Three souls - standing strong like anchored ships waiting for precious cargo.
Her hair, white as foam in the ocean tide in winter, falls lightly on the pillow.
Energy forms a snake lurking, creeping through man's marvelous machines.
Paper-thin skin, frail as a dried leaf, holds to the solid strength of youth.
Scents of life and death mingle, the lingering odor of unnatural perfume.
A twinkle that once beaconed like the lamp of a lighthouse.
Alive only in the falling branches of the family tree.
Air as thick as wind moving over a sandy plain,
Give us space so we can finally breathe.
Sleeping now in God's golden land.
Four generations trimmed to three.

Lisa Lawrence

Will It Break Apart?

The heart of this body is covered in ice.
Loves have tried to melt the pain away.
The scars have not yet healed from years past.
Heart of ice, that is how it will stay.

Closeness puts another wound on the heart.
It can only take so much.
Letting someone into my soul and heart is a question.
Fear comes into the body from a touch.

Shutting the door on love,
Isolation inside one's own heart.
Frozen with pain, love is a reminder,
Will it break apart?

Confusion of the scars and treatments,
Sends one into bleakness.
Shades of heartache and misery cover the inner self.
Humans can love again, but the feeling is less.

Dianna I. Marshall

For Granny

Where do you go when it is time,
for death to take life's hold on the day,
when pain is put aside for good
And the soul is free to be on its way.

We used to discuss it often.
Could you be the gull above?
You said that's what you'd like to be
to watch over those you love.

Although we often talked of a gull,
in the billowing breeze above,
Looking down on the beating surf.
Still I imagine you as a dove.

I'll see you there in the garden
so white, so pure, so calm to me.
Or maybe the robin in the yard,
its brightness there for all to see.

Perhaps you'll feed upon the flowers
beside the butterfly and the bee,
with all the speed of the hummingbird,
Full of life, full of energy.

Mary Jane lived down the lane
in the childhood rhyme you taught me.
Now my child repeats that rhyme.
A treasured tradition passed tenderly.

Visions of the past were truly vivid.
Years that passed had made you wise.
The spirit inside once flowed high,
but passing time had dimmed your eyes.

Even the strong must go to the feast,
to share in the blessings of their lord.
We will see you again one day,
your brightness and energy restored.

Watch over us as a sunbeam,
now you feel no weariness or pain,
Whether gull, dove, robin, or hummingbird,
But where is Mary Jane?

Lisa Lawrence

Pert Near the Same

We get up before the sun ignites the black coal of night.
Stoking the cooking fire, a new blaze signals a new day.
Smells and sounds summon life into our old home.
The steep stairs have endured many breaths of life.
Clanging pots and pans echo the dinner bell in the yard.
Then it's time to eat.

Corn cakes and bacon from last year's hog holds 'em.
Worrying hunger pains can't be a bother to working souls.
Pa and the big'uns head off to work the crops.
I milk the cow, if the ornery creature allows it.
Fluffing each downy bed makes for a loving touch.
Then it's time to eat.

Vegetable soup brimming with the bounty of our land,
Homemade bread - just right for sopping up the juice.
Babies napping lazily on fluffed feather beds.
I scrub so hard the floorboards seem to blend as one.
The wash board momma gave me when I married is worn.
Then it's time to eat.

Fried chicken, taters, and apple pie light up eyes.
We set down to listen to the memories made today.
Clinking of dinner dishes signals the day's closing.
Dogs ain't bumping that screen, since the scraps got tossed.
The young'uns are bathed, tucked away safe in their dreams.
We pray for strength to do pert near the same tomorrow.

Lisa Lawrence

Driving With No Place To Go

Driving with no place to go
Down this road alone
No cars or signs or even trees.
I don't know why I have gone
To this place with no name.
Should I call? Should I phone?

With no one around I can think.
What am I going to do?
I can't go back to that town
They didn't say anything but they knew.
I didn't have time to say anything,
So who?

Driving with no place to go
Down this lonely highway
I might turn back or go forward.
Maybe I will go home someday
All those people and him.
If I go back I can never stay.

Dianna I. Marshall

Dead End

We'd been sitting there for hours, just silence and a couch cushion between us. I couldn't remember the last time I'd been so uncomfortable or so scared. I looked down at my hands in the semi-darkness and saw a glint coming off of my ring. I'd been wearing it for years—it was as much a part of me as the finger it rested on. It was small and delicate, a circle of diamonds that didn't end. I could remember so clearly the look of tenderness and love on Kyle's face when he put it on my hand—it had softened his features into a warm

glow. I looked over at him, sitting stolidly next to me. There was no sign of that now. He sighed, and I looked over.

"What?" My voice was tight. It was hard to get the words out at all.

"Nothing."

"No, really. What?" I was desperate for him to say something, anything. My mouth was dry, and my lips kept catching on my teeth as I spoke. I felt sick. He didn't answer. I couldn't talk anymore. It was silence again. I wasn't surprised.

He stood up and walked to the other end of our small living room. I followed his movements with my eyes. He moved slowly, almost deliberately, across the room, pausing every few steps to shake his head and run his hands through his brown hair. He always did that when he was upset. I just sat there, immobile. Watching him pace, I realized that everything I had ever felt for him was still there. The simple action of running his hands through his hair made my heart pound. But mutual attraction was never our problem. He turned to face me. I could tell he wanted to speak. I just looked at him. In the years I'd known him, I'd learned to wait for him to go first. For the first time since I'd met him, I had no idea what he was thinking. He opened his mouth, then closed it and turned away again. His back was to me. I quickly suppressed a familiar feeling of anger—it seemed like his back was to me a lot lately. It didn't used to bother me. In fact, his back was to me when I first saw him.

I was wandering through the library, looking for a book, when I rounded the corner and saw him standing in the literature aisle, reading. I didn't know who he was, but there was something immediately familiar about him. I couldn't pinpoint the feeling, but it seemed as if his presence was magnetic. I stood there staring at him for what seemed like forever. The thoughts springing to mind were making me blush, and he saw me as I turned away.

"Am I in your way?" Those eyes, a clear green that made my heart begin to pound, met mine. Suddenly I wished I hadn't ignored the curling iron that morning.

"Um, well...actually yeah. I just need to get a book really quick." He stepped aside to let me find it.

"Darn it!"

"Not there?" He was watching me. Though I was glad in a way, his gaze made me even more self-conscious. I mean there was him—this Greek god brought to life and standing in the British literature aisle of the library—and then there was me, in jeans and a sweatshirt with my dingy blonde hair pulled up into a messy ponytail. I took a breath quickly and tried to answer him intelligently.

"No. The catalog says it's here, but maybe someone grabbed-" I saw a book in his hand, MY book—the last book I needed for my final paper in Contemporary British lit.

"You've got it! Are you just browsing or do you need that book as desperately as I do?" I asked. I smiled a hopeful smile, praying that if he didn't give me the book through the goodness of his heart, he would at least be won over by the charm of my smile. Either way, I needed it badly. My nervousness, surprisingly, had disappeared sometime between realizing he was looking at me and seeing him holding the infamous book. He laughed. He laughed!

"I need it pretty desperately, actually. I have a final in Contemporary British Lit I have to finish"—He held up the book"—with this particular book." I was shocked.

"You too? Who do you have?"

"Walters. You?"

"Same. What time?"

"9 a.m.—way too early."

"Me too! We're in the same class. I can't believe I didn't notice you before." Did I actually say that out loud?

He smiled again.

"Small world, but a big class." He looked down at the book. I felt my knees start to shake a little bit so I shifted positions. He looked back at me. I willed myself to stay upright and decided to be bold.

"So, what are we going to do about this book? This is the only copy, and neither of us can finish our paper without it. I mean, you'd think that they'd have more than one copy of a book that so many people use. It really doesn't make any sense." I was rambling.

"The book. Hmmm. I don't know." He sounded...wonderful. I stopped daydreaming long enough to think for a minute. I smiled as an idea came to mind.

"How about sharing it?"

He looked interested so I continued quickly.

"We could meet somewhere to work on our papers. If you want, we could even study together for the final." I smiled again. Actually, it was kind of hard to stop. "I know I can use all the help I can get."

He thought for a moment, then smiled. My heart was pounding so hard that I could feel it at the tiptop of my head. I was sure it was visible to the naked eye.

"That sounds great." He paused for a moment and seemed uncomfortable.

We stood awkwardly for a brief moment, then both began to speak at once. Laughing, he motioned for me to go first. I extended my hand.

"I'm Natalie Marshall. Pleased to meet you."

As he took my hand and shook it, I felt my breath catch in my throat. His face showed he felt something too, but I told myself it was probably a reaction to my sweaty palms. He released my hand as he said,

"Kyle Anderson. Nice to meet you too."

Kyle cleared his throat and I shook my head quickly, unwillingly letting reality take over. Time had marched on—we were older, supposedly wiser.

We're in New York, in law school. It wasn't the past...it was now. And it was bad.

I looked at Kyle. Though his face was stony, I thought I could see in his eyes a glimmer of some emotion. I felt my eyes well up. The man I promised God I would love forever was standing eight feet away from me, but I couldn't reach him. I hadn't been able to for a long time. I felt compelled to speak, to break the silence.

"Why?" My voice had a desperate quality to it, one I wished it didn't have. But this was the question I'd wanted to ask for hours but hadn't for lack of courage. He kept staring out the window.

"Something's changed." He turned to me, his face only half-lit by the fading sunlight shafting into our tiny living room. I could only see his eyes. They were indecipherable.

"I....I don't know how to say this, but I have to say something." His voice was steady, but he cleared his throat. "When we first met, you changed my life. I became a whole different person when you would walk into a room. I could talk to you about anything, and I knew you understood me in a way no one else had before."

"And now?" I whispered.

His expression didn't change.

"Now I find it difficult to talk to you at all."

"Kyle, I want to help..."

He interrupted me. "The best way you can help me is to leave me alone." Seeing my expression—crushed and shattered, I'm sure—he softened a little bit. "I just need some time to think."

I nodded, grabbed my bag, and left, closing the door softly behind me. When I heard the door shut, with the little metallic ping of the latch catching, I burst into tears. Holding onto my bag with a death grip and flying down the street, I cried. The street was neither empty nor crowded—it was a constant flow of people passing by me in a blur. Everything I passed reminded me of the good days—the smells from the bakery, the warmly lit windows of the bookstore we browsed in for hours on end, the parking meters, the stoplights, the street signs. It really didn't matter what I saw, it reminded me of him.

I didn't know where I was going or what I was going to do. Life kept speeding by me but I stayed stuck in slow motion. I always seemed to be desperately trying to keep up. I realized it was like that with Kyle too—he was the editor of the law journal, he was the one getting job offers from all over the country. Where was I? I slowed down, my tears stopped, and I looked up for the first time since I'd left the apartment. Wasn't I important too? I started remembering what he'd said to me. I was surprised by the surge of anger that nearly overcame me. I felt a deep pang of regret for walking out like I did. I never used to run from confrontation, but with Kyle I'd always tried to smooth things over, to keep the peace. It seemed like I was doing that a lot lately. But this was different, wasn't it? Was saving our marriage more important than my opinions? This was my life, my future—not just ours.

I turned around and started walking towards the apartment. I had gotten surprisingly far away from home without realizing it. Walking down the block, my eyes were focused upward. The street vendors were all closing up—I hadn't realized it, but it was getting dark. A streetlight above my head flickered to life. What was I going to do? Nothing had been resolved, nothing had been settled. Everything was the same—the way it had been for so long.

My steps quickened, and I felt myself hurrying toward the building. I didn't know what I was going to do when I got there, but I knew I had to get there. I had reached the doorway and was opening the heavy glass door when I heard someone call my name. I spun around, startled. I hadn't recognized the voice. It was Kyle. He looked rumpled.

"Hey, I was standing right here. Didn't you see me?"

I hadn't noticed.

"No. Leaving?"

Kyle nodded slowly, still looking at me.

"I was coming to find you."

A neighbor came to the door and looked—I thought strangely—at us. I could feel Kyle's eyes on me as I nodded to her and smiled hello, moving aside so that she could pass. Kyle just stood there. I turned back to him, and our eyes met for a fleeting moment. Out of habit, I gave him a tiny smile. My stomach was in a knot and I kept clenching and unclenching my fists. Kyle didn't seem to notice.

He looked past me into the street as he spoke, following a cab with his eyes as it passed.

"I know that this doesn't make sense. I know what you want, but I need your help to fix this—"

"Kyle."

"Yeah..."

I looked at him and shook my head. "I can't help you."

His face fell. "Why?"

I couldn't believe how surreal this conversation was to me. I took a deep breath.

"We're not happy. We haven't been for a long time. Aren't you tired of that?" I paused for a moment, but he didn't say anything. He was still staring into the street, though now it was virtually empty. "I am."

I looked at him, and for the first time since I began speaking, he looked back.

"I'll see you, Kyle."

I walked past him into the lobby, entering the idle elevator. I heard him call after me. His voice echoed into the empty, bare-walled room.

"Hey!"

I poked my head out of the steel doors.

"It's not the end, you know."

His face was hopeful and arrogant at the same time. I chuckled to myself.

"Yeah, actually it is, Kyle."

I stepped back into the elevator. The doors closed between us and I smiled.

Carrie Bolte

This story was selected for the 1999 Elizabeth Gibson Taylor Award, which is given for the most outstanding work of prose by a Peace Student.

I Said A Prayer

I said a prayer
For you today
Since I found out
You passed away

My father cries
And my grandfather too
For they both know what
They lost in you

A wonderful mother
And loving wife
You loved your grandchildren
As much as your life

But seasons change
And with it age
Took its toll
As if you turned a page

God needs you now
More than we
Your loved ones know
You are happy with thee

And though you are gone
Your memory stays
You are still a part
Of everyone's days

I love you
And I miss you so
And long to be with you
When it is my turn to go

I said a prayer
For you today
Since I found out
You passed away

Michelle Carls

Mind's Eye

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds,"
But the unity of separate aspires
For which a love is not a worthless find
Of stray forces driven by desires.
It is to that never ceasing sweet, sweet morrow
Whose bittersweet words embellish thine own ears,
Clinging upon the beloved souls left to follow,
Eternally erasing protruding fears.
Dream my love; live in palaces golden
Enriched with nobles and fair maidens, where
Righteous men reproach not the olden,
Where chivalrous knights raise your flame to bear.
To this mind's eye carves your pleasure,
Now sleep—sleep, behold life's treasure.

Stacy Johnson

This poem was selected for the 1999 Penny Poetry Award, which is given for the most outstanding work of poetry by a Peace Student.

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